

## **INNOVATION GOES GREEN WITH THE SUPPORT OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

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Some time ago, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the international community observed the ninth annual World Intellectual Property Day to raise international awareness about the importance of intellectual property to our wellbeing. This year’s theme, “Promoting Green Innovation,” emphasizes the importance of intellectual property (IP) to advancing the development of green technologies and eco-friendly products that support a healthy environment and promote sustainable agricultural and economic development.

We are in a period of heightened concern about both climate change and global economic crisis. Historically such challenges have sparked innovation, presenting new opportunities to benefit from intellectual property. By encouraging enforcement of trade rules, including intellectual property protection, we can support innovative industries, create new jobs and solve global challenges.

Creative individuals and industries continue to generate solutions to some of the most difficult problems that face the world today. Intellectual property protections help foster environments in which creativity and innovation can thrive and contribute to economic development and improved quality of life around the world:

On a quest to improve the vision of a billion of the world’s poorest people by 2020, Oxford University physics professor Josh Silver invented a pair of eyeglasses that people can adjust on their own. Provided for free, this invention helps the disadvantaged who have only limited access to an optician. Silver has already delivered some 30,000 pairs to disadvantaged individuals in 15 countries and ultimately hopes to distribute 100 million pairs around the world each year. Efforts are also underway to streamline the design of the eyeglasses and make them more widely available by decreasing their cost of production.

Innovation is at the heart of civilization. The pursuit of new knowledge is at the center of human spirit and is what led Thomas Edison to invent and develop technologies like the light bulb. The U.S. IP system allowed others to build upon Edison’s work by granting him patent protection that allowed him to reap financial benefit for his significant contribution to society. We must ask ourselves: Who are the Thomas Edisons of today? Where are they? And, how do we ensure that

IP protections are in place to encourage their innovative spirit and support the safe and secure distribution of technologies to those who desperately need them?

In his inaugural speech, U.S. President Barack Obama reminded us that “our minds are no less inventive” and “our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year.” As we work to address global challenges such as the current international economic crisis, climate change and clean energy, we must redouble our efforts to encourage and protect intellectual property rights and foster a robust environment for global innovation.